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No. 1.

THE THEOSOPHICAL FORUM.

This publication is issued for the benefit of the Members-at-large of the Theosophical Society in America, and each of such members is entitled to a copy free. Branches can obtain copies by contributing to the expense of printing and mailing.

Each member can send questions, answers to questions, opinions, and notes upon Theosophical subjects. When necessary, the various communications will be condensed by the editor. Members will be careful to write on only one side of the paper and to use black ink.

All communications should be addressed to PATH, BOX 2659, NEW YORK CITY.

April, 1889. ALEXANDER FULLERTON.

QUESTION I.

WHAT BOOKS SHOULD I READ IN ORDER TO THOROUGHLY UNDERSTAND THEOSOPHY?

Ans.—Theosophical books naturally divide themselves into two classes, those expounding Theosophy as a science and a philosophy, and those pointing out its lessons as a practical guide in life. The former are to feed the intellect, the latter to inspire the soul. The distinction is substantially that made by Churches between theological treatises and devotional works. Moreover, if the object be to obtain an intellectual conception of the Theosophical system, one should begin with the simpler treatises and advance to the more complex, obtaining first a general outline of the scheme, and then filling up its details so far as these have been vouchsafed. It is to be remembered, furthermore, that, with the exception of three books avowedly dictated or "inspired" by Higher Powers, no works upon Theosophy are to be treated as authoritative. They inevitably present topics as understood by the authors, and contain misconceptions, half-truths, even errors, none necessarily vital, but all impairing that precision which is necessary to a perfect statement. Hence the divergent teachings preceptible in Theosophical literature do not imply that there is no certain truth, or that it may not hereafter be attained, but only that by different writers different aspects of it have been perceived, and also that, in this early stage of esoteric knowledge, entire accuracy is as yet impossible.

Bearing these facts in mind, a progressive course of Theosophical

reading might be something like this: (1) *The Purpose of Theosophy*, or *The Wilkesbarre Letters on Theosophy;* (2) *The Occult World;* (3) *Esoteric Buddhism;* (4) *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky;* (5) *Karma;* (6) *Theosophy, Religion, and Occult Science;* (7) *Five years of Theosophy;* (8) *Isis Unveiled;* (9) *The Secret Doctrine.*

For a course of distinctively practical instruction, the order might be: (1) *Through the Gates of Gold;* (2) *Light on the Path;* (3) *Magic White and Black;* (4) *The Bhagavad-Gita;* (5) Patanjali's *Yoga Philosophy.*

In these two classes the most important works for general public use are, respectively, *Esoteric Buddhism* and *Light on the Path.* The former gives, though with occasional inaccuracies, a singularly clear, vivid, copious, and instructive view of the Esoteric Doctrine; and the latter is pregnant with lessons towards advance in spiritual enlightenment. The former demands some measure of intellectual strength; the latter some measure of spiritual intuition. Both need to be repeatedly read and pondered upon.

C. E. H.—Books give a conception of Theosophy, but cannot give a *thorough* understanding of it. For Theosophy is a universal Science, Philosophy, and Religion, and therefore includes every fact in the Universe. No man can grasp all of these; no being short of The Infinite can do so. Nor, of course, are all such facts attainable, even if comprehensible. All that Theosophists claim possible is to give an intelligent, reasonably accurate exposition of the genesis of the universe and man, together with a view of his destiny and the means to reach it, and the motives to right disposition and to right life. These, in greater or less measure, are within the intellectual capacity of most men, and they are amply stated in Theosophical literature. The most that any one can demand is a doctrine which shall satisfy his reason and his moral sense, and shall furnish the stimulus needed for development. Having his intellectual, moral, and spiritual wants supplied, he is in a position to advance, and it is a certainty in all advance that the new wants encountered will be amply met. He cannot exact *thorough* understanding at the outset. I should say that any one who had mastered *Esoteric Buddhism* possessed an excellent general knowledge of the scheme, which could be expanded and vivified by all later reading.

L. S.—Books are indispensable to any *ap*prehension of the Theosophical system, but to any *com*prehension thereof is required, I take it, a two-fold quality in the reader's mind,—a sense of justice, and a sense of human sympathy. At the bottom of the whole system lies the doctrine of Karma, and through the whole superstructure runs the law of selflessness. Now if any man is lacking in sense of justice, the teaching that human beings frame their own futures by their own acts does not

appeal to him; and if he is self-centred and self-seeking, the teaching of human solidarity and of the need to vanquish egoism is absolutely repellent. There being no responsive feeling to the moral note of Theosophy, its intellectual side must seem to such a man fantastic, perhaps ludicrous. The conditions, not merely to a sympathetic, but even to a just, conception of it are wanting, and the whole scheme must strike him as an ingenious piece of work by imaginative mystics, not at all as a veritable exposition of Divine order.

For these reasons I am disposed to think that all investigation by minds without these two qualities already operative must be fruitless. Hence I should say that the first question to be asked by an inquirer is not "What books ought I to read?" but "Have I that cast of mind without which no knowledge of Theosophy can give either satisfaction or profit?"

QUESTION II.

WHAT ARE THE MEANING AND SCOPE OF THE TERM "UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD"?

K. H.—The first link in the chain of thought inspired by this subject is the realisation of our common origin, brotherhood necessitating the existence of one only Source of all things, the indwelling and all-encompassing Spirit of the Universe, from whom all things come and to whom they must all return. But this identity can naturally be a spiritual identity alone. Spirit is spirit, under whatever conditions or through whatever vehicle it may manifest itself; it can never become passion or desire, it can never be identified with the personality, but it must be recognised as that Higher Self in each one of us which, being outside of any material conditions, is the one real and abiding thing, the element identical in each one of us, which makes brothers of all mankind.

The more material a thing is, the more definiteness it possesses, that is, the more limitations, and therefore the less power of identifying itself with other forms. It is confined to one manifestation. As we go from the material towards the spiritual, limitations fall away, and existence becomes more varied in its aspects. The jar fashioned from the potter's clay will remain forever in the form that he has given it, but the water with which he fills it will take the shape of any vessel into which it may be poured, or, if dashed from a sufficient height, will tremble away and exhale in a wreath of mist, like the cataract of the Stanbach, or, exposed to the action of heat, will be converted into steam. But if we condense that steam, it returns to its original form of water. If we decompose it into its component gases, we have a form still less material, and therefore still nearer to that region of the unlimited which we call Spirit.

We are compelled to see, then, that that which makes us brothers is in no sense personal identity, which depends upon the more material conditions of our being. What is it that constitutes our personality? It is something, or rather a collection of things, belonging to *us* and to no one else; but the very fact that we can put the idea into such a form shows that we think of this personality as something outside of the true Ego. That which *belongs* to me is not me. My desires, my capacities, my weaknesses, are part of my *personality*, but they are not part of the Ego, which shifts them as an actor shifts his robes.

To realise this truth, and to realise that the personality can ceaselessly change while the individuality persists, is to understand the teaching of *Light on the Path;* "Remember that the soiled garment you shrink from touching may have been yours yesterday, may be yours to-morrow." It brings the brotherhood of man down from the spiritual to the material plane, and teaches us the first great lesson of charity to all men. Perfectly to realise this unity of Spirit would make it impossible to feel anger or hatred to any of the human race. Every man becomes a part of ourself, and can no more *offend* us than our right hand can offend us if it becomes palsied or diseased and fails to perform its functions. The great ocean of Life dashes in beautiful white-capped waves upon a glittering beach, or oozes in and out of dirty wharves and muddy creeks, but it is everywhere the same ocean and comes equally pure to all; it is the receptacle that varies, and this teaches us the second great lesson,—purification of ourselves. This is what Dante was thinking of when he wrote in his *Banquet*, "If it happen that, by the purity of the receiving soul, the intellectual virtue be absolutely separate and free from any corporeal shadow, then the Divine goodness multiplies in that soul as in a thing worthy to receive it."

And after we have learned these lessons comes the realisation that through this very diversity of "the receiving soul," as Dante calls it, comes necessarily that diversity of gifts of which Paul speaks. The natural impulse of a generous heart is to follow the lead of another generous heart, and it is a very natural desire to long to help humanity in that way which produces some tangible result, or, as we often put it, to do some real practical good in the world. This generally resolves itself into visiting and relieving the poor, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sick and the afflicted. Without these outward and manifest signs we sometimes feel that we have accomplished nothing, and become discouraged when we compare our "little done, our undone vast" with the beautiful record of another. But it is just as impossible for every one to have the genius for philanthropic work, and the circumstances that make that work possible, as it is for everybody to be capable of writing a symphony or carving an Apollo. And there are many of us who feel that works of charity are only to be done among the

poor. But it seems to me that it is not alone material wants that are to be relieved ; without going out of our own circle, perhaps out of our own homes, we can feed those who hunger and thirst spiritually, and who, like Dives in hell, are longing for a drop of the water of life to moisten the burning tongue. "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

If we are so unfortunate as *never* to be able to find any one that we can help, either by our counsel or our sympathy or our good offices,—a thing that is practically impossible in this crowded world, there is one field of right action that is always open to us, and that is the cultivation of our own influence for good, the gradual creation about us of an atmosphere so charged with all true and holy thoughts and feelings that it shall affect all who come near us with a sense of harmony and peace ; "where still the thanks unheard await the unconscious gift bequeathed." This, at least, whatever may be our disabilities in other directions, we can all work for, not in a vain desire for self-perfection, but in the hope of making ourselves more worthy receptacles for that Divine wisdom "that in all ages, entering into holy souls, maketh them friends of God and prophets." And if friends of God, then necessarily friends of man, and thus we weld together the two ends of the chain, and return to the contemplation of Universal Brotherhood as a necessary sequence of our belief in the One divine Source of all existence.

Hannah R. Phillips.—"What comes from the heart goes to the heart." I who never wrote a poem in my life would ask nothing more from the Muse than the gift to faithfully depict the universal sympathy implied in the term "Universal Brotherhood." Better than "powers," —which we should scarcely know how to deal with, were they ours—, this sympathy, this unselfishness which causes us so to conduct ourselves that we may look fearlessly into others' faces—and into our own, is the passport not only to freedom but to happiness. The speech that stings gives yet a deeper wound to the utterer, and the ability to forgive it implies a love which can only come from a sense of fraternity. When, then, we judge severely, we use but our own standard of excellence, we do not realize that the upward struggle of our brother may have been through a path of thorns, we risk injustice, and we ensure punishment.

E. D. H.—As the T. S. disclaims interference with creeds, the basis of a Universal Brotherhood must be sought in something more important than beliefs and opinions. This can only be the basic principle underlying all religions,—Love to God and Love to Man, and its practical summary we find in the Golden Rule. As the esoteric teaching, notably in *The Secret Doctrine*, states that our present humanity is nearing the time for either a great spiritual progress or a terrible

lapse into deeper unspirituality, there can be no doubt that the Unseen Founders of the T. S. had specially in view the re-assertion of this basic principle as prompting to a right choice. Now of course personal purity and devotion are essential contributions to the great work of purifying the world, but with these must be a sense of our own participation in Humanity as a whole, and consequently the duty, not of merely saving ourselves, but of helping to save it. "The heart of all is Love." "God is Love." The very essence and spring and force of existence is this love. Not *self-love*,—just the reverse. If I realize my oneness with the universe, I must make real in myself its essential quality, and this I do by the largest charity, the widest effort to spread truth and motive, so that, as the time for that momentous choice approaches to the race, it may be fitted to make it through whatever aspiration I as an individual have developed in myself, and as a philanthropist may have imparted to my brethren.

D. N.—The affix "hood" means a state or condition; Brotherhood therefore means a state or condition in which all men are brothers. In its very widest sense "Universal Brotherhood" would include a fraternity with all intelligences through the starry hosts of heaven, a truly boundless family; and in even its usual sense of restriction to this earth, it includes every race, of whatever color or speech. Paul thus aptly put it; "God hath made of *one blood* all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."

Now this word "brothers" implies three things.

1st. That all men have a common origin and parentage. This by no means involves equality of gifts or graces, men being notoriously unlike. The differences observable in a single family are even more marked through Humanity.

2d. That all have, however, an equality in the common rights, privileges, and duties,—the right to work for the family benefit, to protect it when attacked, to share in the father's estate, etc. Sometimes this is invaded individually; sometimes nationally, as where differences of color, strength, or civilization have been used to justify outrage, oppression, and injustice. Theosophy condemns these as unfraternal, and as, consequently, inharmonious with the Wisdom-Religion.

3d. That a common bound of affection exists and should be manifested. This is necessarily the key-stone of the arch, the one thing alone that can make Universal Brotherhood a living reality and not merely a name and a delusion. "Love the Brotherhood," says St. Peter; and St. Paul adds, "Let brotherly love continue." Do we ask why this love of the brethren is inculcated? Because they, like ourselves, are the manifestations of the Unmanifest, the temples within which the Divine Supreme One is enshrined. "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

B. F. D.—I sometimes think that zealous Theosophists, in a creditable anxiety to promote general charity, go a little too far in their assertion of fraternal duty. They speak as if anything is pardonable because done by another man, who, because a man, is a brother. Yet it would seem that the basis of Brotherhood is equal rights and mutual affection, and to these I have the same claim as any other man. He is no more privileged to violate my rights than I to violate his, and I am therefore entitled to the same protection as is he. Hence it cannot be the fact that I am any more bound to look leniently on unfraternal aggressions by him upon me, than I should be upon like acts by me upon him. In other words, it is as much my duty to restrain him from outrage upon myself, as myself from outrage upon him. Theosophy cannot, and does not, teach that all protective appliances are to be thrown down, and that the way is to be freed for every attack by the greedy or the selfish. We must be careful, in our zeal for charity, to remember that justice is the antithesis, not to charity, but to injustice.

Eub. U.—I have heard of "righteous anger", of a "proper withdrawal of sympathy", and of "punishment for evil doers", but these seem to me untheosophic and opposed to Universal Brotherhood. The teachings of Jesus and of Buddha insist upon forgiveness and eternal sympathy. Hence it appears to me that, although the selfish may infringe upon my rights, I should at once forgive the offence, extending to them my sympathy for their spiritual loss and degradation. In insisting upon the opposite course, theosophists ignore the law of nature well known to occultists, that mental positions have effects in every direction, causing disturbances or creating harmony. Each punitive attitude assumed by me acts both on my brother and myself, producing in him a tendency to repeat the act condemned, and increasing in me whatever seeds of evil I may have. While, by my "righteous anger", what I call my rights are for the moment protected and declared, the real and interior effect is bad, and the results in this incarnation as in a succeeding life are painful. Each time I thus pass judgment upon and enforce sentence against my fellow man, I attract to myself from him certain well known and powerful influences that abide in that part of his nature which caused his fault, and thus my own faults and evil tendencies are strengthened. Buddha said, "Hate never ceases by hate." These "rights" we care so much about protecting are merely self-declared, and we own no rights but those which our Karma may accord to us.

A. L.—"Universal Brotherhood" is an assertion that all men are really members of one great family, and this as truly, and in the same sense, as are the members of one domestic circle. It is not a metaphor, but a fact. If the fact was fully recognized and acted out, this earth of ours would be transformed. What would be the consequence of universal

acceptance of the universal fraternity, we can at once see by picturing the world-wide extension of the life of an ideal household. Aggression, violence, fraud, unkindness, injustice of every kind would vanish. There would be no criminal courts, no jails, no scaffolds. War would cease and the whole military provision of nations be ended, industrial activities then taking up the energies of all. On the other hand would develop universal confidence, affection, and helpfulness. Measureless happiness would replace the bitterness, suffering, and sorrow of the present era.

In proclaiming the principle which alone can thus transform the earth, the Theosophical Society is the great human benefactor. Each of us, its members, is to further its work by first gaining a definite idea of what is meant by every other man's being his brother, and then by deliberately, and on principle, living up to it. The two elements in the fraternal relation are *entire justice* and *full affection*. The first accords to my brother every right and privilege I have myself, guards them as rigidly as I would my own, forbids even the thought of invasion or trickery. The second excites positive interest in his welfare, a desire to aid and promote his plans, an effort to save him from trouble and to enlarge his happiness. Both may be summed up in the maxim "Put yourself in his place",—another form of the Golden Rule.

Now this is to be the hourly spirit of every Theosophist who desires to co-operate in the mission of the T. S. The smallest details of life give room for its exercise. If I try to be served out of my turn, if I expect more than a fair share of another's time, if I knowingly cause inconvenience that I may secure a wish, if in any way, however petty, I sacrifice another to myself, I am invading his rights and chilling that spirit. And if I do not spontaneously assist my brother's comfort and pleasure, if I do not find satisfaction in the little courtesies and kindnesses which oil human intercourse, I have not as yet that spirit which, when universal, shall remodel the world. In fact, I am not yet a good Theosophist.

My first contribution to the work of the T. S. is therefore, I think, the most rigid adherence, in the most minute matters of daily conduct, to the principle of careful avoidance of every act trenching on the rights of any other man, and of careful cultivation of the habit of helpfulness and diffusing pleasure. If the smallest matters are thus treated, the larger ones are safe.

QUESTIONS FOR FORUM NO. 2.

1. In what precise way is "Meditation" to be practised by a Theosophist?

2. Some Theosophists say that reading books is needless, but that one should think upon Theosophical subjects. Is this the true theory?

(And perhaps other questions.)